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ABSTRACT

The Tennessee State Board of Regents adopted a resolution at the March, 1977, meeting directing the staff to conduct a study of low producing degree programs in the System. Such a study was initiated using criteria for program review selected by the System's Academic Affairs Sub-Council. Members of this Sub-Council are the chief academic officers of the System institutions. Board staff screened all degree programs using the average annual number of graduates during the four-year period ending Summer, 1976. The 167 programs failing to meet this criterion were screened at the campus level using criteria relating to: faculty load, cost per student credit hour, course utilization, headcount enrollment, and institutional priorities. Study recommendations resulted in the removal of 47 programs from the low producing list, continued monitoring of 49, an in-depth review of 51, consolidation of 10, and the termination of five. By focusing institutional attention on the review of academic programs, high cost programs with low productivity output measures will be assessed to determine the desirability and feasibility of continuing them. In this manner, institutions will better utilize the scarce resources provided to them for the education of the citizens of the State. (Author)

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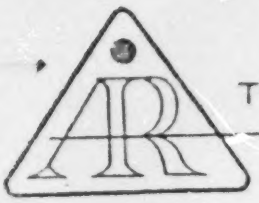

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REVIEW OF ACADEMIC DEGREE PROGRAMS: STRIVING TO KEEP HIGHER EDUCATION VIABLE IN A TIME OF LIMITED RESOURCES

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ABSTRACT

The Tennessee State Board of Regents adopted a resolution at the March, 1977, meeting directing the staff to conduct a study of low producing degree programs in the System. Such a study was initiated using criteria for program review selected by the System's Academic Affairs Sub-Council. Members of this Sub-Council are the chief academic officers of the System institutions.

Board staff screened all degree programs using the average annual number of graduates during the four-year period ending Summer, 1976. The one hundred sixty-seven programs failing to meet this criterion were screened at the campus level using criteria relating to: faculty load, cost per student credit hour, course utilization, headcount enrollment, and institutional priorities.

Study recommendations resulted in the removal of forty-seven programs from the low producing list, continued monitoring of forty-nine, an in-depth review of fifty-one, consolidation of ten, and the termination of five.

By focusing institutional attention on the review of academic programs, high cost programs with low productivity output measures will be assessed to determine the desirability and feasibility of continuing them. In this manner, institituions will better utilize the scarce resources provided to them for the education of the citizens of the State.

Introduction

Accountability was the watch-word in higher education in the early 1970's. Knezevich (1973, p. ix) in the inaugural issue of New Directions for Education says that appraisal and accountability may well be the most talked-about, written-about, and worried-about ideas in education during the early 1970's. In an article in the aforementioned book, Knezevich (1973, p. 11) wrote: "Accountability, for better or for worse, is the 'in' term of the early 1970's and has replaced 'relevance' as the most popular word in the vocabulary of education writers."

Moving well into the late 1970's, accountability is still the watch-word in higher education. Folger (1977, p. vii) sees new meanings in accountability. Emphasis is not only on fiscal standards but also on whether or not our social institutions are doing an effective job and whether resources are being used efficiently.

This new emphasis raises the question, "Are public institutions, including those in higher education, providing the appropriate services to their publics in the most efficient manner?" To answer this question, legislators are insisting that statewide coordinating and governing boards review not only new academic program requests but also existing programs. In 1975, Barak (1975, p. 2) surveyed fifty state coordinating agencies requesting copies of their policies and procedures for program review. This survey revealed that forty-four states have a new program review policy (Barak, 1975, p. 1).

The pattern for the comprehensive review of existing degree programs was not as clear. Barak (1975, p. 13) found that several states have developed

program review procedures, but that the review authority for existing programs is not as widespread or as accepted as the review of new programs.

Tennessee legislators became aware of this national concern and they began asking more and more questions relative to academic programs being offered in public, higher education institutions in Tennessee. They showed a special interest in program duplication and proliferation. The legislators pressed higher education officials for more and more accountability measures.

In 1977, several legislators serving on education committees of the Tennessee House and Senate specifically addressed the issue of low producing programs in Tennessee public, higher education institutions. The legislators seemed to believe that state dollars could be saved or put to more productive use by phasing out academic programs which were not attracting a significant number of students. The Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC), the state-level coordinating body for higher education, was asked to identify low producing programs in both systems of higher education. (Higher education institutions in Tennessee are governed by two bodies, the State Board of Regents and the University of Tennessee Board of Trustees.)

THEC was familiar with such study requests since the Commission conducted one low producing study in 1974. The 1974 study (THEC, 1974, p. 2) had two major purposes:

a. To encourage the elimination of programs with low enrollment, low degree production, and high costs in order to improve the economy of operation of the institutions.

b. To insure a high quality educational experience for the students. . .

The THEC study (1974, p. 3) identified underproductive programs by considering the number of degrees awarded in the major from 1968-69 through 1972-73. Programs were classified as underproductive when they produced "On an annual basis an average of ten or less bachelors degrees,five or less masters degrees, four or less educational specialist degrees, and three or less doctoral degrees."

Using this screening process, 48 baccalaureate and 38 master's degree programs were classified as low producing in the State University and Community College System (SUCCS). Including the University of Tennessee System (UTS), 137 programs were identified. Of this number, 92 programs were continued with monitoring, 29 programs were consolidated, and 16 programs were terminated.

1977 Study

THEC, in response to the legislators' 1977 request, developed a list of low producing programs in SUCCS and UTS. This list was reviewed by both governing boards, and some programs were removed after the review. A letter was given to the legislators transmitting the list and providing some explanations relative to certain programs such as the ones in the allied health area where clinical spaces often dictate low enrollments.

On March 4, 1977, the SUCCS Board, reacting to the THEC brief study, adopted a resolution directing the Board staff to conduct a complete study using numerous criteria with the purpose of isolating low producing degree programs in the System.

To comply with the directive the staff requested the assistance of the Academic Affairs Sub-Council. The Academic Affairs Sub-Council is comprised of the university academic vice presidents and the community college academic deans and serves to advise the Chancellor and his staff in matters of academic concern. This assistance was readily provided during the three phases of the study:

1. Development of a design for the study.
2. Collecting and reporting data from individual institutions.
3. Achieving consensus on final recommendations to the Board.

Study Design

The Board staff conducted the following studies to prepare material relative to low producing programs which might guide the Academic Affairs Sub-Council in developing its criteria and study design:

1. Secondary data search at the Nashville Joint Universities Library, and
2. Survey letters to all fifty states requesting information.

From the secondary data search the staff developed a list of possible criteria for use in the review of low producing programs. These criteria were arbitrarily divided into two lists, a sampling of which is shown below:

Quantitative	Environmental
1. Number of graduates	1. Quality of faculty
2. Student demand	2. Quality of graduates
3. Profile of major	3. Evaluation of resources available
4. Faculty workload	4. Research production
5. Manpower requirements	5. Accreditation status
6. Student credit hours (SCH)	6. Evaluation of the departments
7. Cost per SCH	7. Admission requirements
8. Enrollment by major	8. Program priority
9. Program duplication	9. Program goals
10. Attrition rate	10. Institutional role and scope

The staff mailed individual letters to 89 boards or commissions representing higher education in the 50 states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia. In states with separate boards or commissions for community colleges and universities, letters were mailed to each agency. The staff received replies from 74 agencies.

This survey revealed that in nine states community college boards or commissions had been involved in low producing studies. Twenty-two university boards or commissions had been involved in low producing studies. Similarly, 20 community college and 23 university boards or commissions had not been involved in such studies. No responses were received from 15 agencies.

Most of the respondents provided a listing of criteria which they used in their studies or provided a copy of their final reports. The respondents' reply indicated an overwhelming use of an initial screening device such as the number of graduates in a major averaged over a selected number of years.

Other criteria were also mentioned and described, including:

1. the highest 25 percent of programs in terms of institutional cost per student majoring in the program,
2. all programs in which the number of degrees granted per year had declined by 25 percent or more in the period studied,
3. all programs which would require additional expenditures for added faculty, improvements in library holdings, facilities, and in equipment,
4. the number of students enrolled in the program,
5. faculty workload, and
6. the appropriateness of the program to a revised institutional role or mission.

Several of the criteria provided by the survey were adopted by the Academic Affairs Sub-Council but were modified to meet institutional data resources.

The survey responses also provided data as to the type of actions recommended in the studies. It was revealed that in some states the boards or commissions recommended an annual audit of low producing programs. In addition, a review or full scale evaluation of a particular program was considered as another recommendation, and several review models were furnished. As an additional recommendation, the survey revealed the option of program consolidation.

Overall, the survey of the 50 states was very helpful. It not only provided the Sub-Council with ideas, but it also reinforced the impression that this type of study is being done throughout higher education.

Reporting

Using the ideas obtained from the staff research efforts, the Academic Affairs Sub-Council developed a plan for conducting the study. The plan required the Board staff to make the initial identification of low producing programs, by screening data in the System's academic inventory, computer files. Programs were tentatively classified as low producing when they were characterized by the conditions stated in Table 1.

The programs identified by applying these criteria were further screened by the staff before sending lists of programs to the institutions which offered them. During this second screening procedure, programs were removed from the lists when it was found that (1) they had produced above the minimum criterion level during three of the immediate past four years, or (2) they showed revitalization by producing above the minimum criterion level during the immediate past two years. Following this process, the evaluation of individual programs by the institutions began.

The universities evaluated the low producing programs identified by the Board staff using the following criteria:

1. Average faculty instructional load in the department which offers the program.

   - Criterion: 275 or more student credit hours per FTE faculty for the 1976 fall term.

2. Cost per student credit hour to offer the low producing program courses.

   - Criterion: The program's per student credit hour cost equals or is less than 1.25 times the average per student credit hour cost for all similar programs in the State's public institutions.

3. Utilization of the program's courses as requirements for students in other degree programs.

   - Criterion: Fifty percent or more of the program's required courses serve as requirements for students in other degree programs.

When the low producing programs failed to meet the above criteria, the universities extended their appraisals to include consideration of (1) the headcount enrollment trend for the program, and (2) the priority assigned to the program in relationship to the role and scope of the institution. In such cases, these factors influenced the university's recommendation concerning the future of the program.

Two of the quantitative criteria selected for use by the community colleges differed from those applied to university programs. These institutions evaluated the low producing programs with reference to the headcount enrollment in the program for the 1976 fall term (Criterion: 30 or more declared majors), and the number of student credit hours generated by the program's courses (Criterion: 200 or more student credit hours). The program cost criterion was the same for the community colleges and the universities. The community colleges also reviewed the low producing programs in relationship to institutional priorities when the programs failed to meet the quantitative criteria.

Achieving Consensus

Upon receipt of the reports on individual programs from the institutions, the staff proceeded with the final evaluation. During this process answers were sought to the following questions:

1. Do the data and explanations from the institutions indicate that the program is viable and worthy of continuation as an autonomous program, or in consolidation with another program?

2. If the program is to be continued, should special conditions be associated with its continuation (annual monitoring or an indepth review)?

3. Can significant financial savings be achieved by terminating the program?

4. Will termination of the program alter the role and scope of the institution?

The answers to these questions constituted the bases for the staff's recommendations pertaining to each of the low producing programs. The recommendations were discussed with the Chancellor and with the chief academic officer at each institution. From these discussions, data modifications were made, consensus as to future actions was achieved, and recommendations were made to the Board.

Recommendations to the Board

The study identified 167 discrete programs as low producing. The majority of these were offered by the universities--132 in the universities and 35 in the community colleges. The numerical distribution of these programs by degree levels is presented in Table 2.

The Board staff's review of the reports submitted by the institutions revealed that the programs could be classified into eight groups.

Group one programs were found to be structured and/or implemented in a manner which reduced or eliminated the possibility of generating financial savings by terminating them. There are 33 programs in this group. Some are interdisciplinary, consisting primarily of courses which were developed for other degree programs offered at the institution; some may be described as secondary offerings of departments, i.e., a music program that emphasizes

music education may provide an option for a bachelor of arts; and some are programs in which virtually all of the required specialized courses are also requirements for other programs offered by the institution.

Group two consisted of nine programs. In all cases, the average annual number of graduates was one below the minimum criterion and all other quantitative data indicated definite viability.

Five programs are in group three. The low level of production of graduates in these is caused by an enrollment limitation which is necessary to meet accreditation standards.

The fourth grouping contains 42 programs which the staff and the chief academic officers judged to merit additional surveillance. The undergraduate programs in this group have produced an average of five or more graduates per year and the graduate programs have produced an average of two and one-half graduates per year. Additionally, the programs meet two or more of the other screening criteria.

Group five programs are the ones which the selected measures of productivity are less than those in group four but the nature of the programs are such that their termination would constitute a decision to make a major modification in the role and scope of the institution.

The sixth grouping contains two types of programs:

1. The underproductive programs which clearly do not possess the characteristics for classification in one of the preceding groups, and, additionally, cannot be feasibly consolidated with other operational programs or were not recommended for termination by the institution which offers them.

2. Programs for which the reported information was inadequate for final appraisal.

There are 51 programs in this group.

All programs in group seven are ones that the chief academic officers are presently considering for consolidation with one or more other programs. Ten programs are in this category.

Finally, group eight is made up of the programs which the institutions recommended to terminate. This final group contains ten programs.

Using the above grouping structure, the Board staff recommended to the Board that the following actions be taken relative to each group:

1. Degree programs in groups one, two, and three should be continued in operation and removed from consideration as low producing.

2. Degree programs in groups four and five should be continued but their productivity should be monitored annually by the Board staff for the next three years.

3. Group six programs should be subjected to an indepth review at the level normally required for new program proposals.

4. The institutions with programs assigned to group seven should initiate the necessary faculty action to study the feasibility of consolidating the programs with other appropriate and operational programs.

5. Programs in group eight should be terminated.

The overall impact of implementing the five recommendations of this study would be:

1. Continuing 47 programs with no follow-up action for the 1977-78 academic year;

2. Monitoring of 49 programs for the next three years;

3. Reviewing 51 programs;

4. Consolidating 10 programs; and

5. Terminating 10 programs.

Board Action and Implications

The Board acted positively on each of the recommendations and the monitoring, reviewing, and consolidating processes were initiated. Almost one

year has passed since the Board's action and the institutions are completing the reviews of 51 programs. A staff recommendation will be presented at the June, 1978, meeting of the Board.

Although this study of existing programs has been time consuming and, in a few instances, an upsetting experience, the SUCCS believes that the experience has focused institutional attention on the need to systematically review all academic degree programs. It is anticipated that high cost programs with low productivity will be carefully reviewed by faculty to determine the desirability and feasibility of continuing such programs. In this manner, institutions will better utilize the scarce resources provided to them for the education of the citizens of the state.

TABLE 1

Initial Low Producing Program Criteria

The degree level of the program was----	The age of the program (in years) exceeded---	The average annual number of graduates produced during the four year period ending summer, 1976, was less than----------
Associate	4	10
Baccalaureate	6	10
Masters	4	5
Specialist	4	4
Doctoral	6	3

TABLE 2

Distribution of Low Producing Programs
According to Degree Levels

Associate Degree	Baccalaureate	Masters	All
35	93	39	167

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